

This approach of going it alone has to end. And part of our amendment is to request that we engage in a much more multilateral approach to Iraq.

We have trained 116,000 Iraqi soldiers, sailors, 148,000 Iraqi police and highway patrol and other Ministry of Interior forces. There are 102 operational Iraqi combat battalions in their Army, and 69 are either in the lead or operating independently.

We have made progress. We hope that they are ready, but we think that we have made enough progress to begin our redeployment. Again, the pace of that redeployment will be set by our military commanders.

As General Casey pointed out:

As we are able to draw down our forces, we will receive additional benefits. A reduction in American forces will essentially push more Iraqi troops to the front lines. This is about the dependency.

Those are General Casey's words.

As long as we are there to do the heavy lifting, we will do the heavy lifting. That is an important point to be made and emphasized again and again.

The Government of Iraq was formed. Their National Security Adviser, Mr. Rubaie, stated this week in an editorial that Iraq's position is that it have full control of the country by the end of 2008, and this will mean a significant foreign troop reduction. We envision U.S. troop presence by the year's end to be under 100,000 with the most of remaining troops to return home by 2007. The eventual removal of coalition troops will help the Iraqis who now see foreign troops occupying rather than as liberators. Moreover, the removal of foreign troops will legitimize the Iraqi Government in the eyes of its people.

I do not know if my colleagues will come and accuse the Iraqi National Security Adviser of cutting and running on its own country. Perhaps they will, but they will be wrong.

That is what a leading figure in the Government of Iraq is suggesting. A phased redeployment beginning this year, hopefully concluding by the end of 2007—but again we will leave that up to our military commanders. The benefits will be that the Iraqis will step forward, and also this notion of occupiers will be diminished substantially.

From many different perspectives, this is the right policy at the right time. I hope that our colleagues, on a bipartisan basis, will embrace this policy.

I retain the remainder of any time I have and yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Who yields time?

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I yield myself such time as I may require.

Mr. President, I remember so well last year when we debated an amendment of great importance, and our colleague from Michigan laid down an amendment. Then I took that amendment and rewrote certain portions of it. A great majority of the Senate—I can't remember exactly how many but a vast majority of the Senate—supported that.

I have waited patiently for this amendment. It was given to me yesterday. I have studied it ever so carefully. I didn't denounce the amendment. I said it was a serious amendment. It is a serious amendment. It deserves serious thought.

But, regrettably, there is no way in which I can truthfully say to my side of the aisle and others that this amendment can be revised or modified such that we could hope to get what we achieved last year—a large majority of the Senate supporting the amendment.

That is unfortunate because we start out on a basis of where we could well end up today along strong partisan lines. That comes at a time when our Nation—indeed, the world and, most importantly, the men and women of the Armed Forces—would like to see the Senate and, indeed, hopefully, the Congress standing behind them with strong bipartisanship. But I fear that it is going to be lost with this amendment.

First, I carefully point out to those who are following this debate that this amendment in effect is nonbinding. It is the sense of the Senate, or Congress, as the case may be. But nevertheless it sends signals. It sort of states what this body feels should be done by the President of the United States as he continues to exercise his constitutional powers—I underline “constitutional powers.” He is the Commander in Chief, not Members of the Senate—constitutional powers in carrying forward the actions of our Armed Forces, and the actions of our Government as we try to support the newly elected unified Government of Iraq.

As the nature of this free advice may be, my burden—and those of us on this side—is to point out how this can be misconstrued as the message crosses the ocean and as the Congress is trying to order the President to do certain things. That is not going to be the case.

I have had recently the opportunity to have some private conversations with the President of the United States. My gray hair indicates that I have been privileged to serve in this institution now in my 28th year and before that for a number of years in the Department of Defense. I have worked with, I say with a sense of humility, many Presidents through many chapters of American history. But I must say I have yet to find any President with a stronger resolve, a stronger conviction to do what he believes is in the best interests of the American people, employing the forces of our men and women of the Armed Forces, employing every means this Government has to bring about solutions which he has outlined time and time again in Iraq and, indeed, Afghanistan. It is remarkable, unwavering, listening to advice, taking into consideration the views of others but clearly looking into the future, a future that generations long after we are gone will look back on this chapter of American history and I believe will

decide that we pursued the correct course. Hopefully, those generations will be enjoying the measure of freedom that we have today. But that will only come to pass if the Congress of the United States provides this President the support that he needs.

Therefore, it may be in the nature of free advice, but I want to clearly indicate to all following that there is much to be done to try and explain where I see there is fault in this amendment.

Last week, the Senate overwhelmingly rejected a proposal to establish an arbitrary deadline of a timetable for withdrawal of United States forces from Iraq. An arbitrary deadline of a timetable would have been a serious strategic error, and a historic mistake of withdrawing our forces prior to the Iraqis being able to defend themselves. It would encourage terrorism, embolden al-Qaida, and threaten American security.

Regrettably, the various courses of action that spring forth from the Democratic side of this aisle concern me greatly. They may not say it is a timetable.

It is interesting that in the course of the presentation of this amendment in the media, I have watched my colleagues from that side of the aisle explain what it is they are going to put before the Senate today. Time and time again, they keep saying it is not a timetable; it is not a timetable.

Why must they keep saying that the language is clear, that it is not a timetable?

But let us start with the key paragraph in the amendment of my good friend and long-time colleague.

I repeat it. It is on page 6.

Submit to the Congress a plan by the end of 2006 with estimated dates for the continued phased redeployment of United States forces from Iraq.

Folks, I don't mean to demean this, but that is the English language. It reads very clearly. It is a timetable, no matter how many times people protest it is not a timetable. It is the English language written with clarity.

We cannot accept that.

Our colleagues today on this side of the aisle will vigorously give their views as to why we cannot accept that.

Foremost in my mind is the loss of our men and women of the Armed Forces, now 2,500 in number, that have given the ultimate that any human being, any soldier, any sailor, any marine, any airman can give and that of their families.

I wonder how these individuals would look at this clause and find any other conclusion to draw but that this is a timetable—a timetable that could well cripple the ability of this new government created by the courageous actions of the Iraqi people time and time again in elections, after a hard fought political situation, in which emerges, hopefully, a strong Prime Minister.

They are just beginning to take full seizure of the reins of sovereignty, something this Nation has not had for